

JOHN & JAMES DOBSON CARPET MILL (WEST PARCEL),  
BUILDING NO. 9  
Philadelphia  
Philadelphia County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5383-4

HABS  
PA  
51-PHILA,  
695 H-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
Mid-Atlantic Regional Office  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

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PA  
51-PHILA,  
695H-

**HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY**  
**JOHN AND JAMES DOBSON CARPET MILL (West Parcel), BUILDING 9**  
**HABS No. PA-5383-H**

Location:

4041-4055 Ridge Avenue  
Philadelphia  
Philadelphia County  
Pennsylvania

Present Owner:

Rouse Urban Housing, Inc.  
1500 Walnut Street, 19th Floor  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102

Present Occupant:

Mixed commercial and industrial tenants, artist's studio and vacant.

Significance:

Constructed in 1884 for the finishing and weaving of plush material, Building 9 documents the Dobsons' ability to respond to changing demands in textile markets and technology. This addition to the Dobson complex did not differ from earlier buildings and continued to use the same architectural vocabulary of rubble construction, heavy timber framing and arch-headed multiple-light sash.

## **PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION**

### **A. Physical History**

#### **Date(s) of Erection:**

1884 with alterations in 1887 and the early/mid-twentieth century. The Hexamer Surveys from 1885 and 1889 document this construction sequence.

#### **Architect:**

Unknown.

#### **Original/Subsequent Owners:**

See Chain of Title.

#### **Builder, Contractor, Suppliers:**

Unknown.

#### **Original Plans/Construction:**

Building 9 (originally Building 18) was built as a roughly rectangular 4-story and attic, stone building with a tin roof and regularly spaced fenestration. Fronting the building at its eastern end was a 1-story, stone, with slag roof, engine house and a boiler house. At the northern elevation of the building, a 32' open frame bridge extended between this building and Building 11 (originally Building 19). The first through attic floors had heights of 12', 10', 10', 10', and 8' respectively. Walls were 24" in width. A stairway was located at the eastern end of the interior of the building and a wooden door opened from this building into an adjacent structure to its south. The first floor of the building housed facilities for printing yarn, storing rugs and a steam engine, the second floor was a plush finishing room, the third held brushing machinery and a room for storing and sorting stock and the fourth a power loom for weaving. The attic space was designated as space for warping and winding operations.

#### **Alterations/Additions:**

In 1887, Building 9 was enlarged with an additional 5-story, stone structure with a tin roof. This addition extended to Crawford Street. An exterior open wooden bridge extended from this addition to Building 11. All five stories of this new building were used for operations relating to plush material manufacturing, including finishing seal, finishing plush, velvet finishing and plush weaving. Sometime after 1925, Building 9 was partially

demolished leaving only the 1887 addition standing. The subsequently exposed gable end, originally a load-bearing party wall, was parged with a smooth coat of stucco. Twelve of the original openings were reopened and industrial sash and doors installed. In the early to mid-twentieth century, many of the original wood window sash were replaced with industrial steel sash and brick fire towers were added at either end of the building, one of which remains today. The original timber framing of the structure was reinforced sometime during the twentieth century with the insertion of steel tie rods and a steel I-beam post and lintel system in the basement.

### **B. Historical Context**

Building 9 documents the continued growth of the Dobsons' mill into the 1880s and the mill's adaptability in adjusting to the increasing demands for the fashionable plush textiles at this time. The architectural vocabulary of the building is consistent with that used throughout the site, simple vernacular rubble construction dominated by brick arched, multiple-light sash. The location of the building, extending from the center of the west parcel to the edge of Crawford Street, relates to the gradual infilling of the Dobson site with new construction and additions to accommodate increased operations.

## **PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION**

### **A. General Statement**

#### **Architectural Character:**

The vernacular architectural character of Building 9 is typical for the mill buildings on the Dobson site; rubble construction, brick segmental arched windows and regularly spaced fenestration. The building's modernization in the early twentieth century has altered the majority of the windows.

#### **Condition of Fabric:**

The masonry is in generally sound condition with some eroded mortar joints. The structure itself has been reinforced over time with tie rods and I-beams.

### **B. Description of Exterior**

#### **Overall Dimensions:**

S elev.-143'; E elev.-46'; N elev.-85.2'; E elev.-20.4'; N elev.-33.8'; NW elev.-42'; W elev.-31.6'.

Foundations:

Rubblestone.

Walls:

Rubblestone. East elevation has buttresses created from the walls of the east end of the building demolished c.1925. The lowest story of this elevation is partially below grade. The north elevation is capped by a wooden bargeboard and has a projecting three-story rubblestone annex and five-story brick elevator shaft; the existing grade partially obscures the ground floor. The west elevation is capped by a wood fascia and the south elevation terminates in an overhanging wooden gutter box and has its basement story partially obscured by Building 9A.

Structural System/Framing:

Rubble masonry bearing walls with heavy timber framing. Masonry is reinforced with steel tie rods.

Porches/Stoops/Balconies/Bulkheads:

East elevation concrete and rubblestone loading dock with concrete steps. North elevation modern metal fire escape, west end has a steel with wood plank floored bridge with pipe rail.

Chimneys:

None.

Openings:

Doorways/Doors:

East elevation- southernmost ground floor opening has been altered with modern door, elevator shaft has double-leaf wood doors with metal cladding at each level. Fire escape on north elevation has three wood cross-braced doors.

Windows/Shutters:

East elevation- fenestrated with four bays of segmentally arched windows containing industrial steel sash windows installed post-1925, upper story unfenestrated, basement story windows are infilled. North elevation- fifteen bays of windows relieved by brick segmental arches, the majority of the windows were replaced by industrial steel sash in the 1920s. West elevation- regularly spaced fenestration, replacement industrial steel

sash set under flat-headed stone lintels. South elevation- seventeen bays of segmental arched windows; majority of the sash was replaced by industrial steel sash in the 1920s.

Roof:

Low-pitched, gable roof covered in built-up asphalt that is carried on a structure of central ridge rafters supported on a row of wooden piers. Brick elevator tower is capped with a concrete slab.

C. Description of Interior

Floor Plans:

Rectangular, largely open industrial space on all floors, divided by a row of longitudinal wooden columns supporting wooden floor joists. Second and third stories have recent plywood dividers, fourth and fifth stories are divided by partitions.

Stairways:

Triangular stairwell in the western corner of the building with three sides wrapping around a four-story space. The majority of its wood trim, newel posts and rails survive though in poor condition. Exterior brick elevator tower on western end of northern elevation.

Flooring:

Ground floor- concrete; all other floors- original and replacement industrial wood flooring.

Wall/Ceiling Finishes:

Walls are of plastered rubble, ceilings are exposed timber and planking.

Openings:

Doorways/Doors:

No surviving original or historic interior doors.

Windows:

All windows are recessed in unornamented plaster.

Decorative Features and Trim:

N/A.

Hardware:

Original hardware, which is no longer extant, is presumed to have been utilitarian in character.

Mechanical Equipment:

Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: See PA-5383-C for heating system, air conditioning is N/A, ventilation by window mounted fans, exhaust ducts, or air conditioning units.

Lighting: All modern lighting.

Plumbing: Early-20th-century ceiling mounted, fire suppression, sprinkler system.

**D. Site**

General Setting/Orientation:

Building 9 is located on the western edge of the west parcel of the Dobson site, adjacent to Crawford Avenue. This portion of the site was filled in primarily in the 1880s with the facilities for plush textile manufacturing. Its original primary elevation, facing the center of the site, is no longer existent and has been replaced with a former party wall which has been stuccoed. The building is set at a low grade with a steep slope of earth to the north.

Historic Landscape Design:

See Historic Context Section.

Outbuildings:

N/A.